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*Addresses:* Guy M. Kirwan, 55 West End Street, Norwich NR2 4DP, U.K. Paulo Martuscelli, Instituto Florestal de São Paulo, Caixa Postal 194, Peruibe (SP), 11750-970, Brazil. Luís Fábio Silveira, Pós-Graduação, Departamento de Zoologia, Universidade de São Paulo, Caixa Postal 11461, CEP 05422-970, SP, Brazil. Dr Robert S. R. Williams, c/o Stoford Manor, West Buckland, Wellington, Somerset, TA21 9LS, U.K.

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## A westward extension to the known breeding range of Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini* in Siberia

by J. L. Quinn & Y. Kokorev

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Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini* breeds across the sub- and high-Arctic of North America and Asia but has a restricted distribution within this biome. Across the Asian continent, for example, it is thought to breed in just six discrete areas and is found along a very small proportion of the continental coastline. Apart from sporadic breeding on Spitsbergen (20°E), where birds may originate from Greenland (Isaaksen & Bakker 1995), the most westerly areas in which they have been found include the northern part of the Taymyr Peninsula (100°E), eastern Taymyr

(107°–115°E) and the Indigirka Delta (150°E) (Ilyichev & Zubakin 1988; Blomqvist & Erlander 1981).

Observations made in July 1995–1997 during expeditions to the Pyasina Delta (74°N, 86°E) in western Taymyr, northern Siberia, suggest the presence of a previously unrecorded small population of Sabine's Gulls, 600 km west of their current western limit. In 1995 a single pair was found nesting communally with one pair of Arctic Terns *Sterna hirundo* and eight pairs of Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* (precise location undetermined). In 1996 three pairs were found nesting along with 13–15 pairs of Arctic Terns (73°42'N, 86°45'E) and in 1997 a further five pairs were found (Verkhniy Island, 73°47'N, 86°55'E). These colony sizes are similar to those found in eastern Siberia (Kondratiev & Kondratiev 1987). We did not search for nests because in all cases birds reacted to our presence by aggressively mobbing both ourselves and neighbouring gulls and terns, providing good evidence that they were defending active nests.

These records were made by chance and with little effort. Given that the delta is about 50 km long, up to 20 km wide in places and is dotted with several tens of islands, it is possible that the population here numbers tens of pairs, though is unlikely to be any larger. The islands on the outer parts of the delta have been visited frequently by others who have never recorded Sabine's Gulls (B. Ebbinge, *pers. comm.*). Furthermore, on the several journeys we made through the delta, only one adult Sabine's Gull was seen away from land, although this is perhaps not so surprising because they feed mainly inland during the breeding season (Cramp & Simmons 1977).

The habitat used by the nesting gulls was similar to that recorded in other parts of their range. All nested on low-lying, flat islands in the middle part of the delta. These islands were dominated by typical maritime saltmarsh vegetation (mosses and grasses) and were dotted by numerous small brackish pools which provide ideal feeding habitat for the gulls. The localised distribution of nesting Sabine's Gulls in Asia presumably reflects a limited amount of this habitat.

Whether these records represent an extension to the known, or an expansion of the actual, range is unclear. The fact that Russian biologists have visited the Pyasina Delta on many occasions supports the latter possibility (E. Lappo, *pers. comm.*). On the other hand, it is equally plausible that the species has not previously been recorded simply because the delta is so large. Although the numbers of pairs detected so far are small, their continuous presence over three seasons, and the likelihood that many more pairs are present on the delta, justifies updating the current breeding range of Sabine's Gull.

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Addresses: JLQ-i) EGI, Department of Zoology, University of Oxford, South Parks Road, Oxford, UK, OX1 3PS & ii) The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, GL2 7BT, UK. YK-Extreme North Agricultural Research Institute, Komsomolaskaya, Norilsk, Russia.

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## BOOK RECEIVED

Pazzucconi, A. 1997. *Uova e Nidi degli Uccelli d'Italia*. Pp. 655, 95 coloured plates of eggs (photographs), Calderini, Bologna, Italy. Italian liras 85,000 (hbk). ISBN 88-8219-014-5.

In 1896 H. Seebohm wrote, in the introduction to his *A History of British Birds*, that oology may be described as the poetry of Ornithology. That is as true today as at Seebohm's time, even if many things have changed: large collections were assembled in the last century and in the first half of the current one and no need for extensive collecting is presently felt. But reference materials have proved so important in many fields of investigation that each nation should have a complete collection of the eggs of its birds scientifically collected and preserved. This is quite easy because most amateur oologists have demonstrated their willingness to pursue the highest scientific standards. This is certainly true of Aldo Pazzucconi, who has dedicated at least 50 years of his life to assemble, on behalf of the Museo Civico di Scienze Naturali di Milano and the Laboratorio di Zoologia Applicata alla Caccia (now Istituto Nazionale per la Fauna Selvatica), the most complete collection of the eggs of the birds nesting in Italy. Two pages are devoted to each of the 265 species dealt with: distribution, habitat requirements, location of the nest, the nest, the eggs, laying and incubation time and clutch size are described. A table gives egg dimensions and weight. The plates are truly wonderful, with up to 9 complete clutches and series of up to 20 representative eggs from different clutches to illustrate the variability in the same species. For Cuckoo enthusiasts there are 2 plates with 36 pairs of eggs documenting 21 different host species. The publisher must be complimented on the quality of the printing; the numberless colour nuances, the differences of shine and of grain of the shells are wonderfully presented. Since 1976, when the last volume of the work by Makatasch was published, no one has confronted himself with this particular aspect of ornithology and we are proud that this new, wonderful work comes from Italy. The pity is that it is written in the Italian language, but the plates and the tables are self explanatory and there are indices to the Latin, Italian, German, English and French names of the birds. This work should be on the bookshelves of all ornithologists, professionals as well as amateurs.

Guiseppe Micali